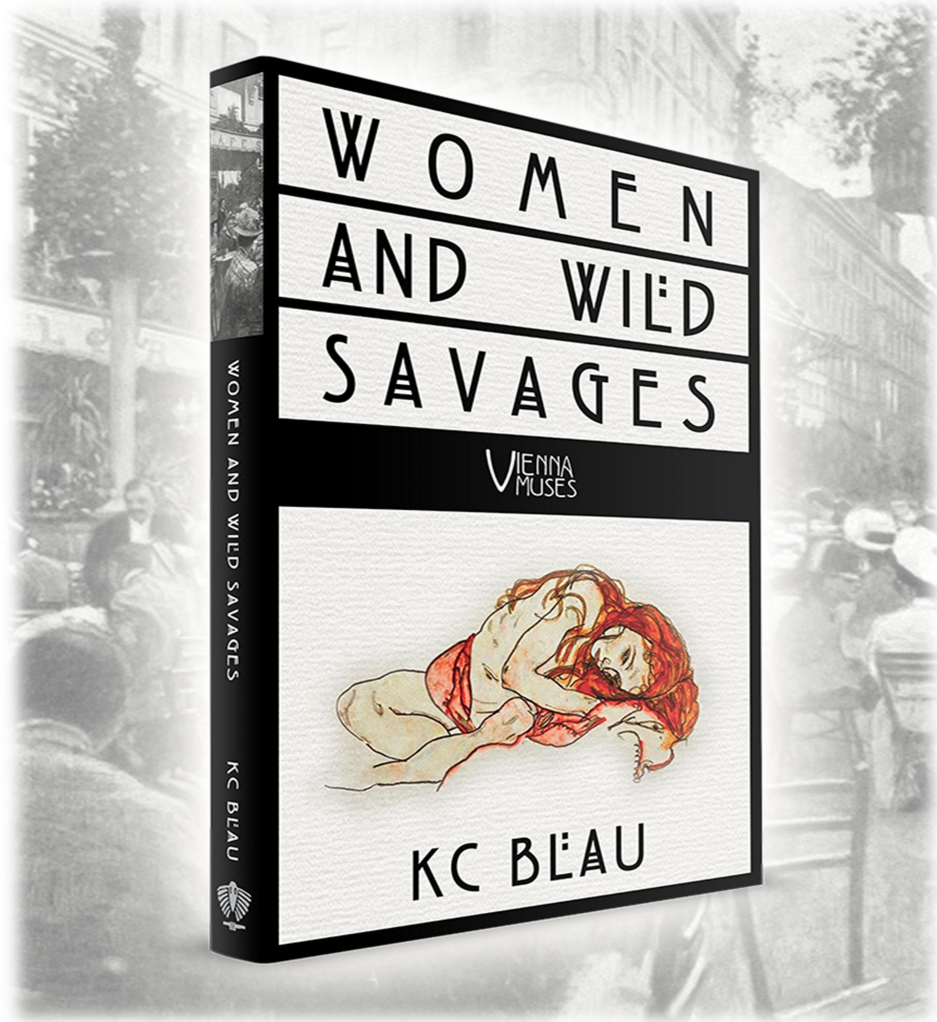


WOMEN AND WILD SAVAGES



READERS GUIDE

A short readers guide to supplement the book

WOMEN AND WILD SAVAGES

READERS GUIDE

LOVE & MARRIAGE

1. Lina proposes that the ideal marriages would have a set time limit – two years for example. What do you think of this idea?
2. Do you think that Adolf Loos loved his wife? Why or why not? Was he a good husband?
3. Lina tells Heinz that marriage changes a relationship. Do you think this is true? If so, how?
4. Did the age difference between Lina and Adolf Loos play a significant role in the marriage? Would the marriage have been different if they had been closer in age?
5. Emma Rudolph is living with two lovers at the same time. She argues that jealousy is learned and can and should be overcome. Do you agree?
6. Stefan Grossmann tells Heinz Lang that every man needs the memory of the love that was but couldn't be in order to keep him in the "tracks of everyday life." What do you think about this?
7. Did Lina love Heinz and/or Adolf Loos? Is it possible to love more than one person at the same time?
8. How has society's views on marriage and the expectations of what is required before, during and (sometimes) after a marriage changed?
9. Is love the most important ingredient for a "good" marriage?
10. What defines a "good" marriage? Longevity? Happiness? Children? Stability? Does society promote unrealistic expectations of the perfect union and a happily ever after?
11. You have been asked to write down advice for a young bride-to-be and a young groom-to-be. If you are married or have been married, pretend you are writing the advice to your younger self and partner shortly after the decision to wed, what would the notes say?
12. A recent study from Emory University found a correlation between cheaper engagement rings and lower divorce rates (<http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/13/living/wedding-expenses-study/>). The study did not explore the reasons why. What do you think the reasons could be?

SEXUALITY

1. In many countries throughout the world including Austria, prostitution is legal. Is this good or bad? Should a woman have the “right” to sell her body? Would there be a positive side to making prostitution legal?
2. If you are opposed to the legalization of prostitution, are you also opposed to the legalization of surrogate motherhood or egg and sperm donations? How are the ethical questions involved (self-determination of body use) similar and how do they differ?
3. According to Lina and Helene, a man is expected to know what to do on his wedding night and a woman is expected to be a virgin. Have these expectations changed?
4. The characters discuss sexual unions. Lina suggests that when two people have sex, there is a kind of spiritual as well as a physical bond. Do you agree? How does this influence your view on relationships in general?
5. Helene claims she would prefer her husband go to a prostitute rather than have a mistress. In many societies, there exists a latent acceptance of mistresses. Do you think cheating is cheating or are there different degrees of betrayal?
6. The book includes a few intimate scenes. Are these significant to the story overall?
7. The characters discuss the appeal of a virgin to a man. Is virginity still a valued trait? Why is a woman’s virginity perceived differently than a man’s? Why were virgins sacrificed to volcanoes?
8. Loos believes that Lina has dishonored him by being unfaithful. Many societies today share the view that a woman can bring dishonor to an entire family by engaging in sexual relations outside of a marriage. Do you agree with this view? Why do you think this view exists?
9. At the turn of the century, acting was often considered a sketchy career choice for a young lady because actresses were often considered promiscuous. In Austria, male ski instructors can have a somewhat similar reputation. Can you think of other examples in which perceptions of promiscuity are associated with a particular job?

WOMEN & THEIR SOCIAL ROLE

1. Two different types of maids are presented in the novel - one in the form of Mitzi and one in the form of Frau Oberndorfer. How are they similar or different?
2. What woman in the novel do you admire most and why?
3. Have circumstances improved for women over the last century? What has and hasn’t?
4. Imagine you are friends with a woman whose spouse controls what she does, says, etc. What, if anything, would you do or say to her? What if the husband is your brother? What do you say to him?

5. How has the role of women in society changed from the time of your grandmother, to your mother and to you?
6. Three mother figures appear or are described in the book – Lina’s mother, Loos’ mother and Heinz’s mother. How do they compare with one another?
7. At the turn of the century in Vienna, there were two kinds of woman depicted in works of art and literature – the femme fatale and woman-child. The femme fatale was the woman who could wield her sexual allure to snare a man and get what she wanted (see for example Klimt’s 1909 painting entitled “Judith and the Head of Holofernes” in which an erotic-looking Judith holds the severed head of Holofernes: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_and_the_Head_of_Holofernes). The woman-child was the innocent darling who needed protection and guidance from a big strong man. What do you think of these portrayals? Why did they happen at the time when women were marching the streets for equal rights?
8. In many societies a dowry is still given to a man from his bride’s family. In the US, many fathers of the bride still foot the bill for the wedding. What do you think about these practices?
9. Nowadays, many women choose to keep their last names when they marry rather than taking their husband’s. What do you think about this? What name should the children have? If they should have both names then what name should the children’s children carry?

MEN & THEIR SOCIAL ROLE

1. In the 1900s, society expected men to take care of women in their social sphere – to financially provide for family members but also to socially attend to women in public – like helping them be seated, opening doors for them or seeing them home safely. Has this changed? If so, how? Are the changes good or bad?
2. If you are man, do you hold doors open for women? If you are women, do you prefer when a man holds a door for you? Why or why not?
3. How are Heinz, Adolf and Peter similar? How are they different?
4. “No woman knows, or ever has known, or ever will know, what she does when she enters into association with a man.” Do you think this is true?
5. How would you describe the character of Peter Altenberg? Is he a true friend to Adolf Loos? To Lina? To Heinz?
6. Adolf Loos was expected to take over his father’s marble business when his father died. Loos chose not to do so and his mother disowned him. Do you think this influenced his view of women throughout his life?
7. Should men be required to pay alimony to a woman who has cheated on him? What if she stayed home to raise their children?

LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. The title “Women and Wild Savages” is taken from an essay by Adolf Loos entitled “Ornament and Crime” in which Adolf Loos compares women to wild savages in their love of ornament. Do you think this is appropriate? Another title would have been “The Quiet Hours” taken from the poem written by Peter Altenberg. Which do you think is a more suitable title for the book? Why?
2. Throughout the novel a pearl necklace is mentioned. What is its significance?
3. In the beginning of the novel, Adolf Loos sings the praises of a cigarette case that Lina accidentally breaks. At the end of the novel, an allusion is made once again to the case. What is the significance?
4. The novel is told from various points of view, both male and female. Does this add or distract from the story? If the author should have just chosen one point of view, whose should it have been?
5. The chapter about the Sweet Girl’s life is entitled “Spoken into the Void,” which is the title of one of Adolf Loos’ books. Why do you think the author chose this title for this chapter?
6. The novel is classified as literary historical fiction. Do you agree with this classification? Could the novel also have been classified as women’s fiction? Why or why not? Are classifications important?

VIENNA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY (1900 – 1910) AND SOCIETY TODAY

1. Do places like Café Central still exist today?
2. Otto Weininger, the 23-year old author of the book entitled, “Gender and Character” (*Geschlecht und Charakter*) tells the round table that after the publication of his work there would be three possibilities for him: “the gallows, suicide or a future so brilliant that I wouldn’t dare imagine it.” In real life he kills himself shortly following his book’s publication. Why do you think his views were so widely discussed in Vienna at the turn of the century?
3. Do people like the waiter in Café Central, Herr Ober Franz, still exist today? If so where?
4. At the turn of the century, Viennese would often meet in coffeehouses to socialize and discuss the matters of the day. Where do people meet to discuss matters in today’s society?
5. In Vienna, even today, academic and professional titles are important. In the US, they are not used as frequently. Why do you think there are differences? Should titles be used in a society? If so, when? Is it disrespectful to forget someone’s title or to insist that a title be used?
6. When the Hapsburg Empire fell, Austria banned the use of imperial titles such “Prince” or “Duke” or “Baroness”. Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

7. Graphology was used in Austria for many years. Candidates applying for jobs with the courts and many other places were required to submit a hand-written CV. Do you think hand-writing and reveal things about a person? What signatures? Will hand-writing become obsolete someday?
8. Do you agree that objects have a soul?
9. Do you believe in fate?
10. What did you know about fin-de-siècle Vienna before reading the book? Have your views changed since the book?
11. In the early 1900s, women throughout the Western world banded together to fight for equal rights. In Vienna, articles by US suffragette, Susan B. Anthony, were translated and printed in newspapers such as the "Dokumente der Frauen" (*Documents of Women*). Think of issues facing many women today such as the kidnappings of college students in Nigeria, acid attacks of school girls in Afghanistan, death by stoning for adulteresses in Saudi Arabia, enslavement of Yazidi women by ISIS in Iraq or female genital mutilation of many women in Africa. Do women today have a responsibility to their "sisters" abroad to help address these issues?

STORY PONDERINGS

1. Would you like to live in the world described in the story? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Lina's decision at the end of the novel to leave for America was wise?
3. Do you think Peter Altenberg's letter was responsible for Heinz Lang's suicide?
4. Do you think Adolf Loos has changed by the end of the story?
5. Is Peter Altenberg a likeable character? Do you think he is a poet?
6. Adolf Loos claims that Vienna is teeming with wild savages, what do you think he means?
7. Imagine you are Lina Loos' friend and travel to the mountains to help her make her decision. What would you advise her to do?
8. Is it important to live within one's means? Think about credit cards and Bitcoins. How has the exchange of money changed from earlier times to today? What are the positives and negatives?
9. When Heinz asks Lina if she loves him, Lina responds:
"What truth? The truth today could be a lie tomorrow. And two people can be a part of the one relationship and live two wholly different truths. There are no truths. There are only different interpretations of what is. At any time on any given day, one could be closer to the truth than the other. And then the very next day, or hour or minute, life topsy turves everything and the one who is closer, is farther away." Do you agree or disagree?